

On alleged substrate effects in some languages of Siberia (comment on the paper by I. Ya. Selyutina "phonetic-phonological investigations of the languages of Siberia in the Nadelyaev Laboratory of experimental phonetic research of so RAN")

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Abstract

© 2016 Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences. This is a comment on the paper by I. Ya. Selyutina "Phonetic-phonological investigations of the languages of Siberia in the Nadelyaev Laboratory of experimental phonetic research of SO RAN". The theoretical framework adopted in the paper ("the theory of articulatory-acoustic bases", proposed by V. M. Nadelyaev) assumes that a substrate influence in phonetics and phonology will occur automatically in a situation of language shift, which is questionable. Moreover, a strict definition of "articulatory-acoustic basis" is not provided, making it difficult to assess the theory. Selyutina also specifically presents a hypothesis (likewise based on Nadelyaev's work) that pharyngealization in Even is a result of substrate influence. This particular proposal, however, runs counter to molecular anthropological evidence, which indicates that Evens are genetically speaking Tungusic, and from a historical phonological point of view pharyngealization can be explained as an internal development. One of the most intriguing results in Selyutina's paper concerns the fundamental frequency in Tuvan pharyngealized vowels. Normally one would not expect pharyngealization to be accompanied by a characteristic fundamental frequency. Even if one assumes that pharyngealization is accompanied by glottalization, the particular f_0 contour described in the paper is unexpected. Finally, I. Ya. Selyutina reports some data on special laryngeal anatomical features of South Siberian Turkic peoples, who are supposed to descend from speakers of Uralic and Yenisseian languages who underwent language shift. But anatomical measurements from speakers of the supposed substrate languages are not presented, and it would be very surprising-indeed, sensational-to find any connection between a certain anatomical phenotype and specific features of a language.

Keywords

Acoustic phonetics, Experimental phonetics, Language contact, Languages of Siberia, Pharyngealization